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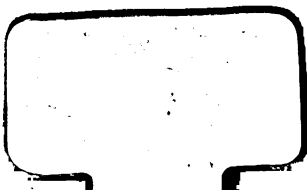
A FAITHLESS WORLD

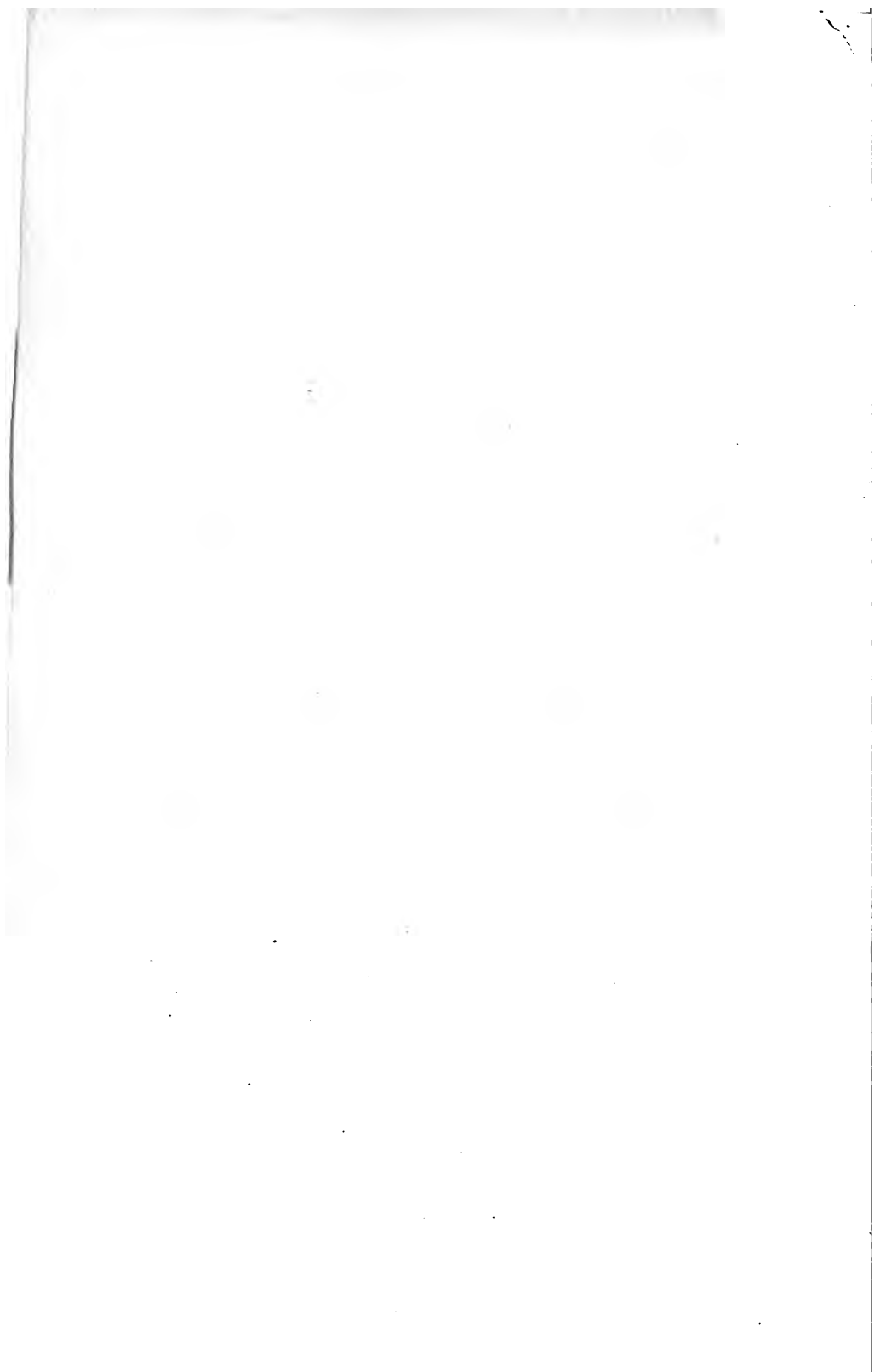


By

FRANCES POWER COBBE.







A FAITHLESS WORLD.

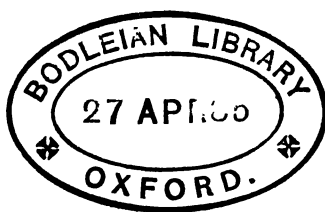
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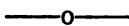
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P R E F A C E.



THE following Essay, written originally for the *Contemporary Review*, pretends to be no more than an incomplete outline of a large subject. Whole provinces of the map of a fully drawn *Faithless World* have been left out. I have said nothing of the effects which the disappearance of Religion could not fail to produce on the general averages of crime and vice; nor have I attempted to follow the consequences of omitting all religious teaching in the education of children. As regards the last subject, I imagine that evidences are not wanting, even now, of a diminished reverence for human parents, which is the natural sequel of cultivating the intellect while failing to train that moral sense of veneration which can never be fully developed except towards a Divine Being. Already the fatal note has been sounded that we have heard enough of the Duties of Children to Parents, and must learn chiefly to think of the Duties of Parents to Children;—these last, according to the same programme, seeming to consist in the reckless encouragement of the children's selfishness and

iv.

self-sufficiency, till a youth of satiety leads up to a manhood of pessimism. And, as concerns the increase of crime and vice generally, it seems to stand to reason that, with the disappearance of the ideas of an Invisible Witness and Judge of human actions, and of a future world wherein those actions must inevitably bear their fruit, there will be lost two of the heaviest counterweights which Virtue has hitherto been able to put into her scale against the temptations of evil. Morality is, indeed, separable both logically and practically from religion. Good or evil do not exist solely by the arbitrary will of God ; nor is it only in (conscious) obedience to His will that man can choose the good and reject the evil. But that the belief in ONE Supremely Good—personified eternal infinite Goodness—is the greatest of all aids to that choice, can be scarcely a matter of debate ; nor, consequently, that the extinction of the belief will alter to a measureable extent the proportions of the choosers on either side. Strong and high-minded men, especially those engrossed by intellectual pursuits, will no doubt persist (as many of them are persisting now) in virtuous courses in a *Faithless World*. But for ordinary human beings the case must needs be otherwise ; and in the chief

departments of practical morality,—namely, the relations of the sexes and the rights of property,—there are, if I mistake not, sufficiently threatening signs already visible that when Religion falls—if ever it should fall—there will crash down after it nearly the whole fabric of society. It is not, as atheists would have us think, merely some rickety and half-ruinous old tenement which they threaten to bring down, while they point complacently to a bran new Model Lodging House for Humanity, which they have built up alongside, and propose soon to open for a *Faithless World*. It is the Westminster Abbey of the human race which their dynamite would shatter into irretrievable ruin.

Amid the difficulties which beset every phase of theological opinion our sympathy is due to those who have struggled sincerely, even if in vain, to retain religious faith, and who, having lost it, endeavour to construct systems, Positivist, Secularist, or Agnostic, which may form a Law of Life in its stead. There is much deserving of respect in their efforts,—hopeless as we may deem them to be,—and more that is pitifully affecting in the attempt of the same persons to offer consolation in the prospect

of "posthumous activities," when the hope of a real immortality has been abandoned. But the truest proof of friendship to men who are embarking in a "coffin ship" is to tell them that wreck is inevitable; and when we see them putting off from shore with flags and music, to bid them observe in how many places their timbers are rotten. The tone of exultation adopted just now by Agnostics and Comtists, as if they were prophets announcing a Kingdom of Man which shall outshine the Kingdom of God, and the still loftier note of superiority sounded by some who "sit as gods holding no form of creed, but contemplating all," and finding all equally childish and unimportant, cannot be heard sounding through the land without a protest. In the hope of recalling to a few how unspeakably tremendous would be that catastrophe of the extinction of religion of which they have begun to speak as if of a not remote contingency, I have written this brief and (I am conscious), very imperfect enquiry into the inevitable conditions of a "FAITHLESS WORLD."

March, 1885.

A FAITHLESS WORLD.

A LITTLE somnolence seems to have overtaken religious controversy of late. We are either weary of it or have grown so tolerant of our differences that we find it scarcely worth while to discuss them. By dint of rubbing against each other in the pages of the Reviews, in the clubs, and at dinner parties, the sharp angles of our opinions have been smoothed down. Ideas remain in a fluid state in this mild season of sentiment, and do not, as in old days, crystallize into sects. We have become almost as conciliatory respecting our views as the Chinese whom Huc describes as carrying courtesy so far as to praise the religion of their neighbours and depreciate their own. "You, honoured sir," they were wont to say, "are of the noble and lofty religion of Confucius. I am of the poor and insignificant religion of Lao-tze." Only now and then some fierce controversialist, hailing usually from India or the colonies where London amenities seem not

yet to have penetrated, startles us by the desperate earnestness wherewith he disproves what we had almost forgotten that anybody seriously believes.

As a result of the general "*laissez croire*" of our day, it has come to pass that a question has been mooted which, to our fathers, would have seemed preposterous: "Is it of any consequence what we believe, or whether we believe anything? Suppose that by-and-by we all arrive at the conclusion that Religion has been altogether a mistake, and renounce with one accord the ideas of God and Heaven, having (as M. Comte assures us) outgrown the theological stage of human progress; what then? Will it make any serious difference to anybody?"

Hitherto, thinkers of Mr. Bradlaugh's type have sung pæans of welcome for the expected golden years of Atheism, when "faiths and empires" will

"Gleam

Like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

Christians and Theists of all schools, on the other hand, have naturally deprecated with horror and dread such a cataclysm of faith as sure to prove a veritable Ragnarok of universal ruin. In either case it has been taken for granted that the change from a world of little faith, like

that in which we live, to a world wholly destitute of faith, would be immensely great and far-reaching; and that at the downfall of Religion not only would every throne and temple of the earth, but every homestead in every land, be shaken to its foundation. It is certainly a step beyond any yet taken in the direction of scepticism to question this conclusion, and maintain that such a revolution would be of trivial import, assuming that things would go on amongst mankind almost as well without a God as with one.

The man who, with characteristic downrightness, has blurted out most openly this last doubt of all—the doubt whether doubt be an evil—is, as my readers will have recognized, Mr. Justice Stephen. In the concluding pages of one of his sledge-hammerings on the heads of his adversaries, in the *Nineteenth Century*, he rung the changes upon the idea (with some reservations, to be presently noted) as follows :—

“ If human life is in the course of being fully described by science, I do not see what materials there are for any religion, or, indeed, what would be the use of one, or why it is wanted. We can get on very well without one, for though the view of life which science is opening to us gives us nothing to worship, it gives us an infinite number of things to enjoy. . . . The world seems to me a very good world, if it would only last. It is full of pleasant people and curious things, and I think that most men find no great difficulty in turning their minds away from its transient character.

Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, art, politics, commerce, professions, trades, and a thousand other matters, will go equally well, as far as I can see, whether there is, or is not, a God or a future state."—*Nineteenth Century*, No. 88, p. 917.

Had these noteworthy words been written by an obscure individual, small weight would have attached to them. We might have observed on reading them that the—not wise—person who three thousand years ago "said in his heart, there is no God," had in the interval plucked up courage to say in the magazines that it does not signify whether there be one or not. But the dictum comes to us from a gentleman who happens to be the very antithesis of the object of Solomon's detestation, a man of distinguished ability and unsullied character, of great knowledge of the world (as revealed to successful lawyers), of almost abnormal clear-headedness; one of the Judges of the land; and lastly, strangest anomaly of all! who is the representative of a family in which the tenderest and purest type of Protestant piety has long been hereditary. It is the last utterance of the devout "Clapham School," of Venn, Stephen, Hannah More and Wilberforce, which we hear saying: "I think we could do very well without religion."

As it is a widely received idea just now that the Evolution theory is destined to coil about faith till it strangle

it, and as it has become the practice with the scientific party to talk of Religion as politicians twenty years ago talked of Turkey, as a Sick Man destined to a speedy dissolution, it seems every way desirable that we should pay the opinion of Sir James Stephen on this head that careful attention to which, indeed, everything from his pen has a claim. Those amongst us who have held that Religion is of priceless value should bring their prepossessions in its favour to the bar of sober judgment, and fairly face this novel view of it as neither precious Truth nor yet disastrous Error, but as an unimportant matter of opinion which Science may be left to settle without anxiety as to the issue. We ought to bring our Treasure to assay, and satisfy ourselves once for all whether it be really pure gold or only a fairy substitute for gold, to be transformed some day into a handful of autumn leaves and scattered to the winds.

To estimate the part played by Religion in the past history of the human race would be a gigantic undertaking immeasurably above my ambition.* A very much simpler

* The best summary of the benefits which the Christian religion has historically wrought for mankind is, I think, to be found in that eloquent book "*Gesta Christi*," by the great American philanthropist, Mr. Charles

inquiry is that which I propose to pursue : namely, one into the chief consequences which might be anticipated to follow the downfall of such Religion as at present prevails in civilised Europe and America. When these consequences have been, however imperfectly, set in array we shall be in a position to form some opinion whether we “can do very well without religion.” Let me premise :—

1. That by the word Religion I mean definite faith in a Living and Righteous God ; and, as a corollary therefrom, in the survival of the human soul after death. In other words, I mean by “religion ” that nucleus of simple Theism which is common to every form of natural religion, of Christianity and modern Judaism ; and, of course, in a measure also to remoter creeds, which will not be included in the present purview. Further, I do *not* mean Positivism, or Agnosticism, or Buddhism, exoteric or esoteric ; or the recognition of the “ Unknown and Unknowable,” or of a “ Power not ourselves which makes for righteousness.” These may, or may not, be fitly termed “ religions ;” but it is not the results of their triumph or extinction which we are here concerned to

L. Brace. The author has made no attempt to delineate the shadowy side of the glowing picture ; the evils of superstition and persecution wherewith men have marred those benefits.

estimate. I shall even permit myself generally to refer to all such phases of non-belief as involve denial of the dogmas of Theism above-stated as "Atheism;" not from discourtesy, but because it would be impossible at every point to distinguish them, and because, for the purposes of the present argument, they are tantamount to Atheism.

2. That I absolve myself from weighing against the advantages of Religion the evils which have followed its manifold corruptions. Those evils, in the case even of the Christian religion, I recognise to have been so great, so hideous, that during their prevalence it might have been plausibly—though even then, I think, not truly—contended that they out-balanced its benefits. But the days of the worst distortions of Christianity have long gone by. The Christianity of our day tends, as it appears to me, more and more to resume the character of the *Religion of Christ*, that is, of the religion which Christ believed and lived; and to reject that other and very different religion which men have taught in Christ's name. As this deep and silent but vast change comes over the spirit of the Christianity of modern Europe, it becomes better and better qualified to meet fearlessly the challenge, "Should we do well without religion in its Christian shape?" But it is not my task here to

analyse the results of any one type of religion, Christian, Jewish, or simply Theistic ; but only to register those of *Religion itself*, as I have defined it above, namely, faith in God and in immortality.

I confess, at starting on this inquiry, that the problem "Is religion of use, or can we do as well without it?" seems to me almost as grotesque as the old story of the woman who said that we owe vast obligation to the Moon, which affords us light on dark nights, whereas we are under no such debt to the Sun, who only shines by day, *when there is always light*. Religion has been to us so diffused a light that it is quite possible to forget how we came by the general illumination, save when now and then it has blazed out with special brightness. On the other hand, all the moon-like things which are proposed to us as substitutes for religion,—friendship, science, art, commerce, and politics,—have a very limited area wherein they shine at all, and leave the darkness around much as they found it. It is the special and unique character of religion to deal with the whole of human nature, *all* our pleasures and pains and duties and affections and hopes and fears, here and hereafter. It offers to the Intellect an explanation of the universe, and, pointing to Heaven, responds to the most

eager of its questions. It offers to the Conscience a law claiming authority to regulate every act, every word and every sentiment. And it offers to the Heart an absolutely love-worthy Being as the object of its perfect adoration. Whether these immense offers of Religion are all genuine, or all accepted by us individually, they are quite unmatched by anything which science, or art, or politics, or commerce, or even friendship, has to bestow. The relation of religion to us is not one-sided like theirs, but universal, ubiquitous; not moon-like, appearing at intervals, but sun-like, forming the source, seen or unseen, of all our light and heat, even of the warmth of our household fires. Strong or weak as may be its influence on us as individuals, it is the greatest thing with which we have to do, from the cradle to the grave. And this holds good whether we give ourselves up to it or reject it. It is the one great acceptance, or "*il gran rifiuto*." Nothing equally great can come in our way again.

In an estimate of the consequences which would follow a general rejection of religion, we are bound to take into view the two classes of men—those who are devout and those who are not so—who would, of course, be diversely affected by such a revolution of opinion. As regards the

first, every one will concede that the loss of so important a factor in their lives would alter those lives radically. As regards the second, after noting the orderly and estimable conduct of many of them, the observer might, *per contra*, not unfairly surmise that they would continue to act just as they do at present were religion universally exploded. But ere such a conclusion could be legitimately drawn from the meritorious lives of non-religious men in the present order of society, we should be allowed (it is a familiar remark) to see the behaviour of a whole nation of Atheists. Our contemporaries are no more fair samples of the outcome of Atheism than a little party of English youths who had lived for a few years in Central Africa would be samples of Negroes. It would take centuries to make a full-blooded Atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christians. Our whole mental constitutions have been built up on food of religious ideas. A man on a mountain top, might as well resolve not to breathe the ozone in the air, as to live in the intellectual atmosphere of England and inhale no Christianity.

As, then, it is impossible to forecast what would be the consequences of universal Atheism hereafter by observing the conduct of individual Atheists to-day, all that can be done is to study bit by bit the changes which must take

place should this planet ever become, as is threatened, a *Faithless World*. In pursuing this line of inquiry it will be well to remember that every ill-result of loss of faith and hope which we may now observe will be *cumulative* as a larger and yet larger number of persons, and at last the whole community, reject religion together. Atheists have been hitherto like children playing at the mouth of a cavern of unknown depth. They have run in and out, and explored it a little way, but always within sight of the daylight outside, where have stood their parents and friends calling on them to return. Not till the way back to the sunshine has been lost will the darkness of that cave be fully revealed.

I shall now register very briefly the more obvious and tangible changes which would follow the downfall of religion in Europe and America, and then devote my available space to a rather closer examination of those which are less manifest—the drying up of those hidden rills which now irrigate the whole subsoil of our civilization.

The first visible change in the Faithless World, of course, would be the suppression of Public and Private

Worship and of Preaching ; the secularization or destruction everywhere of Cathedrals, Churches, and Chapels ; and the extinction of the Clerical Profession. A considerable *hiatus* would undoubtedly be thus made in the present order of things. Public Worship and Preaching, however much weariness of the flesh has proverbially attended them, have, to say the least, done much to calm, to purify, and to elevate the minds of millions ; nor does it seem that any multiplication of scientific Lectures or Penny Readings would form a substitute for them.* The effacement

* Since the first publication of this paper I have received a friendly communication from America, informing me of the numerous substitutes for Sunday Sermons and Church Services, in the shape of moral and scientific lectures, which are obtaining great popularity in the United States. The remarkable success of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society in England, has also been described in an interesting article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As the text admits, I entirely believe that such Lectures and public Readings will be multiplied very extensively in the event of the cessation of public Worship and of Religious addresses ; but I must continue to hold the opinion above expressed that they will not be found to form substitutes for them, though they may even occupy the same hours of the same days, and possibly take place in the same edifices. A religious service, such as one of those of the Church of England, or of any of the leading Dissenting churches, followed by an average sermon,—wherein at least some thoughts of God and a higher life than the present have been

from each landscape of the towers and spires of the churches would be a somewhat painful symbol of the simultaneous disappearance from human life of heavenly hope and aspiration. The extinction of the Ministry of Religion, though it would be hailed even now by many as a great reformation, would be found practically, I apprehend, to reduce by many perceptible degrees the common moral level ; and to suppress many highly-aimed activities with which we could ill dispense. The severity of the strictures always passed on the faults of clergymen testifies to the general expectation, not wholly disappointed, that they should exhibit a loftier standard of life than other men ; and the hortative and philanthropic work accomplished by the forty or fifty thousand ministers of the various sects and churches in England alone, must form, after all deductions, a sum of beneficence which it would sorely tax any conceivable secular organization to replace in the interests of public morality.

Probably the Seventh Day Rest would survive every other religious institution in virtue of its popularity among

set forth,—is in comparison to a critical or scientific lecture, what a walk on a mountain is to a trudge along a populous road. The latter may suit better the taste of many pedestrians, but from a health-seeking point of view it will have very different results.

the working classes, soon to be everywhere masters of legislation. The failure of the Tenth Day holiday in the first French Revolution would also forestall any further experiments in varying the hebdomadal interval so marvellously adapted to our mental and physical constitution. As, however, all religious meaning of the day would be lost, and all church-going stopped, nothing would hinder the employment of its hours from morning to night as Easter-Monday and Whit-Monday are now employed by the millions in our great cities. The nation would, therefore obtain the exceedingly doubtful privilege of keeping fifty-six Bank Holidays instead of four in the year. Judicial and official oaths of all sorts, and religious Marriage and Burial rites, would, of course, be entirely abolished. A gentleman pronouncing an *Oraison Funébre* outside the crematorium would replace the old white-robed parson telling the mourners :—

“ Beneath the churchyard tree,
In solemn tones, and yet not sad,
Of what man is, what man shall be.”

Another change more important than any of these, in Protestant countries, would be the reduction of the Bible to the rank of an historical and literary curiosity. Nothing (as we all recognize) but the supreme religious importance

attached to the Hebrew Scriptures could have forced any book into the unique position which the Bible has now held for three centuries in English and Scottish education. Even that held by the Koran throughout Islam is far less remarkable, inasmuch as the latter (immeasurably inferior though it be) is the supreme work of the national literature, whereas we have adopted the literature of an alien race. All the golden fruit which the English intellect has borne from Shakespeare downwards may be said to have grown on this Semitic graft upon the Aryan stem. But as nothing but its religious interest, over and above its historical and poetical value, could have given the Bible its present place amongst us, so the rejection of religion must quickly lower its popularity by a hundred degrees. Notwithstanding anything which the Matthew Arnolds of the future may plead on behalf of its glorious poetry and mines of wisdom, the youth of the future "Faithless World" will spare very little time from their scientific studies to read a book brimming over with religious sentiments which to them will be nauseous. Could everything else remain unchanged after the extinction of religion in England, it seems to me that the unravelling of this Syrian thread from the very tissue of our minds would altogether alter their texture.

Whether the above obvious and tangible results of a general relinquishment of religion would all be *disadvantageous* may, possibly, be an open question. That they would be *trifling*, and that things would go on afterwards much as they have done, seems to me altogether incredible.

I now turn to those less obvious consequences of the expected downfall of religion which would take place silently.

The first of these would be the *belittling* of life. Religion has been to us hitherto (to rank it at its lowest) like a great mountain in a beautiful land. When the clouds descend and hide the mountain, the grandeur of the scene is gone. A stranger entering that land at such a time will commend the sweetness of the vales and woods; but those who know it best will say, "Ichabod!—The glory has departed." To do justice to the eminent man whose opinion concerning the practical unimportance of religion I am endeavouring to combat, he has seen clearly and frankly avowed the ennobling influence of religion, and, as a corollary, would, I presume, admit the *minifying* consequences of its general abandonment.*

* He says: "The leading doctrines of theology are noble and glorious;" and he acknowledges that people who were able to accept them are

If the window which Religion opens out on the infinite expanse of God and Heaven, immeasurably enlarges and lightens our abode of clay, the walling of it up cannot fail to narrow and darken it beyond all telling. Only when they disappear will men perceive how the two thoughts—of this world as *God's world*, and of ourselves as *Immortal beings*—have, between them, lighted up in rainbow hues the dull plains of earth. When they fade away, all things, Nature, Art, Duty, Love, and Death, will seem to grow grey and cold. Everything which casts a glory over life will be gone.

Even from the point of view of Art (of which in these days perhaps too much is made), life will lose *poetry* if it lose religion. Nothing ever stirs our sympathies like it, or like a glimpse into the inner self of our brother man, as affected by repentance, hope, and prayer. The great genius of George Eliot revealed this to her; and, Agnostic

"ennobled by their creed." They are "carried above and beyond the petty side of life; and if the virtue of propositions depended, not upon the evidence by which they may be supported, but their intrinsic beauty and utility, they might vindicate their creed against all others" (p. 917). To some of us the notion of "noble and glorious" *fictions* is difficult to accept. The highest thought of our poor minds, whatever it be, has surely *as such* some presumption in favour of its truth.

as she was, she rarely failed to strike this resonant string of human nature, as in "Adam Bede," "Silas Marner," and "Janet's Repentance." French novelists who have no knowledge of it, and who describe the death of a man as they might do that of an ox, while they galvanize our imaginations, rarely touch the outer hem of our sympathies. Religion, in its old anthropomorphic forms, was the great inspirer of sculpture, painting, poetry, music, and almost the creator of architecture. Phidias, Dante, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Milton, Handel, and the builders of the Egyptian temples and mediæval cathedrals, were all filled with the religious spirit, nor can we imagine what they would have been without it. In the purer modern types of religion, while music and architecture would still remain in its direct service, we should expect painting and sculpture to be less immediately concerned with it than in old days, because they are unable to express purely spiritual ideas. But the elevation, aspiration, and reverence which have their root in religion must continue to inspire those arts likewise, or they will fall into triviality on one side (as there seems danger in England), or into obscene materialism on the other, as is already annually exemplified on the walls of the Paris *Salon*.

As to Science, which may be expected to survive un-

changed, or even to benefit by the fall of Religion, I cannot but think that something is already lost to it when the reverent, tender, modest, and yet lofty spirit of a Kepler, a Newton, a Herschell, a Lyell, is exchanged for the arrogant one which we find pervading the newer school of physicists and physiologists. Also though there are undoubtedly persons to whom accumulated Facts are of themselves satisfying—(the Gradgrinds of education)—there are more, and they certainly not of a lower intellectual rank, whose interest in Facts is chiefly aroused by their value as indicators of some great Truths above and beyond them. To these last, facts which cannot be linked into a chain, or, which if linked, lead to nothing, have but transitory interest. It is when the chain is welded at last to the eternal Throne that everything in Nature assumes its full importance. When Kepler, verifying his grand hypothesis of the law of the planetary distances, exclaimed awe-struck, “O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee,” he touched the zenith of the scientific intellect. Perhaps Carl Vogt, in our day, has reached the Nadir. “Give us,” he says with a scoff, “our daily bread—which is a vivisection.”

Again, it will not merely belittle life, it will *carnalize* it to take Religion out of it. The lump without the

heaven will be grosser and heavier than we have dreamed. Civilization, as we all know, bore under Imperial Rome, and may assume again any day, the hateful type in which luxury and cruelty, art and sensuality, go hand in hand. That it ever changed its character and has come to mean with us refinement, self-restraint, chivalry, and freedom from the coarser vices, is surely due to the fact that it has grown up *pari passu* with Christianity. In truth it needs no argument to prove that, as the bestial tendencies in us have scarcely been kept down while we believed ourselves to be immortal souls, they will have it still more their own way when we feel assured we are only mortal bodies.

And the life thus belittled and carnalized will be a more cowardly life than men have been wont to lead while they had a Providence over them and a Heaven waiting for them. Already, I fear, we may see some signs of this new poltroonery of reflective prudence, which holds that death is the greatest of all evils, and disease the next greatest; and teaches men to prefer a "whole skin" to Honour, and Health to Duty. Writing of this Hygeiolatry elsewhere, I have remarked that it has almost come to be accepted as a canon of morals that any practice which, in the opinion of experts, conduces to bodily health, or tends to the cure of disease, becomes *ipso facto* lawful.

There are many signs apparent that this principle is bearing fruit, and that men and women are beginning to be systematically selfish and self-indulgent where their health is concerned, in modes not hitherto witnessed. In public life it is notorious that whenever a Bill comes before Parliament concerning itself with sanitary matters, there is exhibited by many of the speakers, and by the journalists who discuss it, a readiness to trample on personal and parental rights in a way forming a new feature in English legislation, and well deserving of the rebuke it has received from Mr. Herbert Spencer. As to military courage, I fear it will also wane amongst us if ever the main body of the nation ceases to believe in another life, even as it seems to have waned among the French at Metz and Sedan. Happily as yet our English soldiers seem more likely to follow the lead of a Gordon than of any Secularist lecturer. Great as are the evils of war, those of a peace only maintained by the nations because it had become no longer possible to raise troops who would stand fire, would be immeasurably worse.

From the general results on the community, I now pass to consider those on the life of the individual which may be expected to follow the collapse of Religion.

Mr. Mallock in his "New Republic," made the original

and droll remark than even Vice would lose much of its savour were there no longer any morality against which it might sin. As Morality will not immediately expire, though its vigour must be considerably reduced, by the demise of its Siamese twin, Religion, it would seem that Vice need not fear, even in such a contingency, the total loss of the pleasures of disobedience. Nevertheless (to speak seriously), it is pretty certain that the temperature of all moral sentiments will fall so considerably when the sun of Religion ceases to warm them that not a few will perish of cold. The "Faithless World" will pass through a moral Glacial Period, wherein much of our present fauna and flora will disappear. What, for example, can become, in that frigid epoch of godliness, of Aspiration, the sacred passion, the *ambition sainte* to become perfect and holy, which has stirred at one time or other in the breast of every son of God; the longing to attain the crowning heights of truth, goodness, and purity? This is surely not a sentiment which can live without faith in a Divine Perfection existing somewhere in the universe, and in an Immortal Life wherein the infinite ascent may be climbed. Even the man whose opinions on the general unimportance of religion I am venturing to question in these pages, admits frankly

enough that it is not the heroic or saintly character which will be cultivated after the extinction of faith. Among the changes which he anticipates, one will be that "the respectable man of the world, the *lukewarm*, *nominal Christian*, who believed as much of his creed as happened to suit him, and *led an easy life*, will turn out to have been right after all." Precisely so. The *easy life* will be the ideal life in the "Faithless World;" and the life of Aspiration, the life which is a prayer, will be lived no more. And the "lukewarm" men of the world, in their "easy lives," will be all the easier and more lukewarm for leading them thenceforth unrebuked by any higher example.

Again, Repentance as well as aspiration will disappear under the snows of atheism. I have written before on this subject,* and will now briefly say that Mr. Darwin's almost ludicrously false definition of Repentance is an illustration of the inability of the modern scientific mind to comprehend spiritual phenomena; much less to be the subject of them. In his *Descent of Man*, this great thinker and most amiable person describes Repentance as a natural

* See "Agnostic Morality," *Contemporary Review*, June, 1883.

return, after the satisfaction of selfish passions, to "the instinct of sympathy and goodwill to his fellows which is still present and ever in some degree active" in a man's mind. . . . "And then, a sense of dissatisfaction will inevitably be felt" (*Descent of Man*, p. 90). Thus, even on the showing of the prophet of Evolution himself, Repentance (or rather the "dissatisfaction" he confounds with that awful convulsion of the soul) is only to be looked for under the very exceptional circumstances of men in whom the "instinct of sympathy and goodwill to their fellows" is ever present, and moreover, *reasserts itself, after they have injured them*; in flat opposition to ordinary human experience as noted by Tacitus, *Humani generis proprium est odisse quem læseris*.

The results of the real spiritual phenomenon of Repentance (not Mr. Darwin's child's-play) are so profound and far-reaching that it cannot but happen that striking them out of human experience will leave life more shallow. No soul will survive with the deeper and riper character which comes out of that ordeal. As Hawthorne illustrated it in his exquisite parable of *Transformation*, men, till they become conscious of sin, are morally little more than animals. Out of hearts ploughed by contrition

spring flowers fairer than ever grow on the hard ground of unbroken self-content. There bloom in them Sympathy and Charity for other erring mortals ; and Patience under suffering which is acknowledged to be merited ; and lastly, sweetest blossom of all ! tender gratitude for earthly and heavenly blessings felt to be free gifts of Divine love. Not a little, perhaps, of the prevalent disease of pessimism is owing to the fact that these flowers of charity, patience, and thankfulness, are becoming more and more rare as cultivated men cease to feel "the exceeding sinfulness of sin ;" or to pass through any vivid experiences of penitence and restoration. As a necessary consequence they never see the true proportions of things, of good and evil, sin and retribution. They weigh jealously human Pain ; but they never place human Guilt in the opposite scale. There is little chance that any man will ever feel how sinful is sin, who has not seen it in the white light of the holiness of God.

Again Resignation, springing either from submission to Divine Justice or trust in Divine Love, is a sentiment calm and sweet which we can ill afford to see perish among the troubled elements of mortal existence. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." "It is the

Lord. Let Him do what seemeth Him good." "Though the fig-tree should not blossom, . . . yet will I joy in the Lord." These are low, melodious notes in the Psalm of Life which must needs be silent in a "Faithless World." Let us, for sake of precision, fix our thoughts on a single class of sufferers,—those who are dying irremediably of some painful disease, such as cancer. Hitherto such persons are often, perhaps we might say commonly, found borne up, as it were, on angel's wings of faith and reliance. But to what depths of black despair must they not fall when those wings break under them? Religion is just the one conceivable thing which can afford support in the prospect of inevitable agonizing death. Even Affection itself can only supply motives for the concealment of misery,—not any charm to convert it into gladness. The waters of Mara will remain for our drinking, but the mystic Branch which should have sweetened them is no more at hand. Or let us turn to less terrible trials and deathbeds. These have been hitherto soothed by a certain mild hopefulness, not very bright perhaps, among people not distinctly pious, but still suffusing a gentle radiance through the gloom. The words of an old simple song express so exactly what I mean on this point that I shall quote them, though to some readers they may, perhaps, seem puerile.

A girl is supposed to be dying, and in taking a last leave of her lover, she says :—

“Leave me now, love, leave me now,
Not with sorrow, not with sighs,
Not with clouds, love, on thy brow,
Not with tears, love, in thine eyes.
We shall meet, we know not where,
And be blessed, we know not how ;
With a kiss and with a prayer—
Leave me now, love, leave me now.”

The whole phase of life which these simple lines indicate must pass away when men and women come to think there is no God and no Heaven. And what is to be the substitute for such old-fashioned Resignation under the prospect of death, bereavement, pain, poverty, or disappointment? Men and women will be exhorted by their new guides to exhibit “unembittered compliance of soul with the inevitable,”* and they will be told that *this* is “Resignation.” But, if they be like-minded with most of us now, I imagine that they will ask what there is to take the “bitterness” out of their cup or help them to “compliance?” Nay, perhaps they will feel some indignation at the juggling with words which calls by the same name

* “Life of George Eliot,” Vol. III., p. 297.

sentiments so widely diverse as those which have been hitherto entertained on these subjects by religious men, and those which can possibly be entertained by any one after religion is exploded. To speak of Gratitude when there is no Benefactor to whom to owe anything—and of Resignation when there is no directing Will, to which to resign our own, seems to me as absurd as to talk of triangles with only two angles; and I confess that I share the obtuseness of George Eliot's "accomplished man," whom she could not persuade to see that there was "full enough" meaning in the new sense of the terms. Courage and Fortitude are great and noble virtues which have hitherto flourished alongside of Gratitude and Resignation, and may possibly survive them; but it is a mere piece of word-shuffling to call the Cardinal virtues by the names of their Theological sisters. Instead of acquiring that "unembittered compliance of soul with the inevitable," which is the glory of the modern philosopher, (and, we may add, of the ox), it is to be apprehended that the majority of mankind in the "Faithless World" will feel very bitterly indeed all their sorrows and afflictions when they "wake from day dreams" to find themselves in the "City of Dreadful Night." The pessimism which even now is sensibly

lowering the spirits of the younger generation far below the level of those of their fathers, will chill us to the marrow of our bones ; and under every reverse of fortune men will sink in despair. There can be little doubt, I think, that escape from both bodily or mental pain by the way of Suicide will then be sought more and more, almost in direct proportion as the consolations and supports of religion are lost. When it is understood to be certain that no "dreams will come" in the sleep of death, the choice of "not to be" will be the obvious one for every mortal the moment that pain of any kind outbalances the pleasure of existence. Science will step in to smooth the way of self-destruction by providing for it painless methods ; and thus we may reckon, among the inevitable characteristics of a "Faithless World," on the prevalence of Euthanasia to an extent of which the present registers of suicide afford no indication.

The abrogation of Public Worship was mentioned above as one of the visible consequences of the general rejection of religion. To it must here be added a still direr and deeper loss, that of the use of Private Prayer—whether for spiritual or other good, either on behalf of ourselves or of others ; all Confession, all Thanksgiving, in one word all effort at communion of the finite spirit

with the Infinite. This is not the place in which this subject can be treated as it would require to be were the full consequences of such a cessation of the highest function of our nature to be defined. It may be enough now to say that the Positivists in their fantastic device of addresses to the *grand être* of Humanity as a substitute for real prayer to the Living God, have themselves testified to the smaller—the subjective—part of the value of the practice.* Alas for our poor human race if ever the

* Since the first publication of this Essay, Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his eloquent address on the 1st January, in Newton Hall, has carefully discriminated, between Christian or Theistic "Worship"—and the Positivist "Cult" of Humanity, which he says is only equivalent to the French "*culte des mères*" or "*culte de l'Art*." By "*culte de l'Humanité*" (he goes on to say) is meant "deepening our sense of gratitude and regard for the human race and its living or dead organs." "The full meaning of *culte* as Comte employed it, is every act by which man expresses and every means by which he kindles the sense of reverence, duty, love, or resignation." This is certainly an improvement on the commonly received idea of Comtiste "Worship of Humanity;" but it remains for those who believe in God to reflect that, if it be useful and fitting to kindle consciously our own reverence and love for noble human beings, how indefinitely more useful and more fitting is it that we should kindle those high emotions, not by the mere contemplative memory of the virtuous dead, but by direct address to a Present Divine Being—Himself, as much more worthy than they of reverence and love, as the Sun surpasses a glow-worm.

day should arrive when to Him who now "heareth prayer," flesh shall no longer come!

With Aspiration, Repentance, Resignation, and Prayer renounced and forgotten, and the inner life made as "easy" as the outward, we may next inquire whether in the "Faithless World" the relations between man and man will either remain what they have been, improve or deteriorate? I have heard a secularist lecturer argue that the love of God has been a great hindrance to the love of man; and I believe it to be the universal opinion of Agnostics and Comtists that the "Enthusiasm of Humanity" will flourish and form the crowning glory of the future after religion is dead. It is obvious, indeed, that the social virtues are rapidly eclipsing in public opinion those which are personal and religious; and if Philanthropy be not enthroned in the "Faithless World," there is no chance for Veracity, Piety, or Purity.

But, not to go over ground which I have traversed already elsewhere, it will be enough now to remark that Mr. Justice Stephen, with his usual perspicacity, has found out that there is here a "rift within the lute," and frankly tells us that we must not expect to see Christian Charity after the departure of Christianity. He thinks

that temperance, fortitude, benevolence, and justice will always be honoured and rewarded, but—

“If a purely human morality takes the place of Christian morals, self-command and self-denial, force of character shown in postponing the present to the future” (*qy.*, selfish prudence?) “will take the place of self-sacrifice as an object of admiration. Love, friendship, good-nature, kindness, carried to the height of sincere and devoted affection, will always be the chief pleasures of life, whether Christianity is true or false; but Christian charity is not the same as any of these or of all of them put together, and I think, if Christian theology were exploded, Christian charity would not survive it.”

Even if the same sentiment of charity were kept alive in a “Faithless World,” I do not think its ministrations would be continued on the same lines as hitherto. The more kind-hearted an atheist may be (and many have the kindest of hearts) the less, I fancy, could he endure to go about as a comforter among the wretched and dying, bringing with him only such cold consolation as may be afforded by the doctrine of the “Survival of the Fittest.” Every one who has tried to lighten the sorrows of this sad world, or to reclaim the criminal and the vicious, knows how immense is the advantage of being able to speak of God’s love and pity, and of a life where the bereaved shall be reunited to their beloved ones. It would break, I should think, a compassionate atheist’s

heart to pass from one to another death-bed in cottage, or workhouse, or hospital, to meet the yearning looks of the dying, and watch the anguish of wife or husband or mother, and be unable honestly to say: "This is not the end. There is Heaven in store." But Mr. Justice Stephen speaks, I apprehend, of another reason than this why Christian charity must not be expected to survive Christianity. The truth is (though he does not say it) that the charity of Science is not merely *different* from the charity of Religion; it is an *opposite* thing altogether. Its softest word is *Væ Victis!* Christianity (and like it I should hope every possible form of future religion) says, "The strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak. Blessed are the merciful, the unselfish, the tender-hearted, the humble-minded." Science says, "The supreme law of Nature is the Survival of the Fittest; and that law, applied to human morals, means the remorseless crushing down of the unfit. The strong and the gifted shall inherit the earth, and the weak and simple go to the wall. Blessed are the merciless, for they shall obtain useful knowledge. Blessed are the self-asserting, for theirs is the kingdom of this world, and there is no world after it."

These Morals of Evolution are beginning gradually to

make their way, and to be stated (of course in veiled and modest language) frequently by those priests of science, the physiologists. Should they ever obtain general acceptance, and Darwinian morality take the place of the Sermon on the Mount, the old *droit du plus fort* of barbarous ages will be revived with more deliberate oppression, and the last state of our civilization will be worse than the first.

Behind all these changes of public and general concern, lies the deepest change of all for each man's own heart. We are told that in a "Faithless World" we may interest ourselves in friendship, and politics and commerce, and literature, science, and art, and that "a man who cannot occupy every waking moment of a long life with some or other of these things must be either very unfortunate in regard to his health, or circumstances, or else must be a poor creature."

But it is not necessary to be either unfortunate oneself or a very "poor creature" to feel that the wrongs and agonies of this world of pain are absolutely intolerable unless we can be assured that they will be righted hereafter; that "there is a God who judgeth the earth," and that all the oppressed and miserable of our race, aye, and even the tortured brutes, are beheld by Him. It is, I

think, on the contrary, to be a "poor creature" to be able to satisfy the hunger of the soul after justice, the yearning of the heart for mercy, with such pursuits as money-getting, and scientific research, and the writing of clever books, and painting of pretty pictures. Not that which is "poorest" in us, but that which is richest and noblest, refuses to "occupy every moment of a long life" with our own ambitions and amusements, or to shut out deliberately from our minds the "Riddle of the painful Earth." A curse would be on us in our "lordly pleasure-house" were we to do it.

Even if it be possible to enjoy our own good fortune regardless of the woes of others, is it not rather a pitiful wreck and remnant of merely selfish happiness which it is proposed to leave to us? "The world," we are told, "is full of pleasant people and curious things," and "most men find no difficulty in *turning their minds away* from its transient character." Even our enjoyment of "pleasant people and curious things" must be held, then, on the condition of reducing ourselves—philosophers that we are, or shall be—to the humble level of the hares and rabbits!—

"Regardless of their doom the little victims play."

Surely the happiness of any creature, deserving to be

called Rational, depends on the circumstance whether he can look on Good as "the final goal of ill," or believe Ill to be the final goal of any good he has obtained or hopes for;—whether he walk on a firm, even if it be a thorny road, or tread on thin, albeit glittering ice, destined ere long to break beneath his feet?

I know that as some have believed in God but not in immortality, so, conversely, there are persons who believe in a future life, but not in a Divine Ruler of things. Perhaps such is the view of many modern spiritualists and "esoteric Buddhists." But—not to discuss the illogical nature—(as it appears to me) of such one-sided faith, the truth is, that *if* there be no God, not only are all imaginable terrors open to our fears beyond the tomb, but there is no Hope, worthy of the name, left to us at all. The Hope of Heaven, as we moderns understand it, is supremely the hope of *seeing God*—of finding Faith swallowed up in something which to the spiritual eye is Sight; of ceasing to "lift lame hands and grope," and at last clasping Assurance. And that Beatific Vision means the seeing that *God is God*, as we have adored Him—the infinitely Just and Loving, in whose domain *all is right*, for all and for ever. The sense of wrong and injustice around us which crushes us now, is then to be

lifted for ever. The pity, which now makes our hearts ache and bleed, is to be changed for rejoicing in the joy of all God's creatures. This, and this alone, can be HEAVEN. Men may look either for a Valhalla, or a Nirvana, or a Moslem Paradise, or a wretched Limbo of spirits at the beck and call of "mediums," while leaving God out of the picture. But there can be no *Heaven* without Him.

The faith that there is an Order tending everywhere to good, and that Justice sooner or later will be done to all, —this, almost universal, faith to which the whole literature of the world bears testimony, is an absolutely indispensable condition of any happiness worthy of a human being. If it be finally baulked, and we are compelled to relinquish it for ever at the bidding of science, existence alike on our own account and that of others will become unendurable.

In all I have said hitherto, I have confined myself to discussing the probable results of the downfall of religion on men in general, and have not attempted to define what they would be to those who have been fervently religious; and who we must suppose (on the hypothesis of such a revolution) to be forcibly driven by scientific arguments out of their faith in God and the life to come. To such

persons (and there are, alas ! many already who think they have been so driven, and to whom the sad result is therefore the same) the loss must needs be like that of the darkening of the sun. Of all human sorrows the bitterest is to discover that we have misplaced our love ; laboured and suffered in vain ; thrown away our heart's devotion. All this, and much more, must it be to *lose God*. Among those who have endured it there are, of course, as we all know, many who have reconciled themselves to the loss, and some tell us they are the happier. Yet, I think to the very last hour of life there must remain in every heart which has once *loved* God (not merely believed in or feared Him) an infinite regret if it can love Him no more ; and the universe, were it crowded with a million friends, must seem empty when that Friend is gone.

As to human Love and Friendship, to which we are often bid to turn as the best substitutes for religion, I feel persuaded that, above all other things they must deteriorate in a "Faithless World." To apples of Sodom must all their sweetness turn, from the hour in which men recognize their transitory nature. The warmer and more tender and reverential the affection, the more intolerable must become the idea of eternal separation ; and the more beautiful and admirable the character of our

friend, the more maddening the belief that in a few years, or days, he will vanish into nothingness. Sooner than endure the agony of these thoughts, men will assuredly check themselves from entering into the purer and holier relations of the heart. Affection, predestined to be cast adrift, will throw out no more anchors, but will float on every wave of passion or caprice. The day in which it becomes impossible for men to vow that they will love *for ever* will almost be the last in which they will love nobly and purely at all

But if these things hold good as regard the prosperous and healthy, and those still in the noon of life, what is to be said of the prospects in the "Faithless World," of the diseased, the hungry, the bereaved, the aged? There is no need to strain our eyes to look into the dark corners of the earth. We all know (though while we ourselves stand in the sunshine we do not often *feel*) that hundreds of thousands of our fellow mortals are at all times suffering bodily and mental anguish. When these overtake us, or when Old Age creeps on, and

"First our pleasures die, and then

Our hopes and then our fears,"

is it possible to suppose it will make "little difference" what

we believe as to the existence of some loving Power in whose arms our feebleness may find support ; or of another life wherein our winter may be turned once more to spring ? If we live long enough, the day must come to each of us when we shall find our interest in our daily newspapers most often in the obituary columns, till, one after another nearly all the friends of our youth and prime have “ gone over to the majority,” and we begin to live in a world peopled with shadows. Our talk with those who travel still beside us recurs continually to the dead, and our very jests end in a sigh for the sweet ‘old laughter which we shall never hear again. If in these solemn years we yet have faith in God and Immortality, and as we recall one dear one after another—father, mother, brother, friend,—we can say to ourselves, “ ‘ They are all gone into the world of light ; ’ they are all safe and rejoicing in the smile of God ; ” then our grief is only mourning ; it is not despair. Our “ sad hearts ” are cheered and softened, not turned to stone by the memories of the dead. Let us, however, on the other hand, be driven by our new guide, Science, to abandon this faith and the hope of eternal reunion, then, indeed, must our old age be utterly, utterly desolate. O ! the mockery of saying that it would make “ no great difference ! ”

We have been told that in the event of the fall of religion, " life would remain in most particulars and to most people much what it is at present." It appears to me, on the contrary, that there is actually *nothing* in life which would be left unchanged after such a catastrophe.

But I have only conjured up the nightmare of a "Faithless World." GOD LIVES ; and in His light we shall see light.

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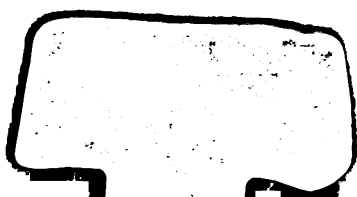
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